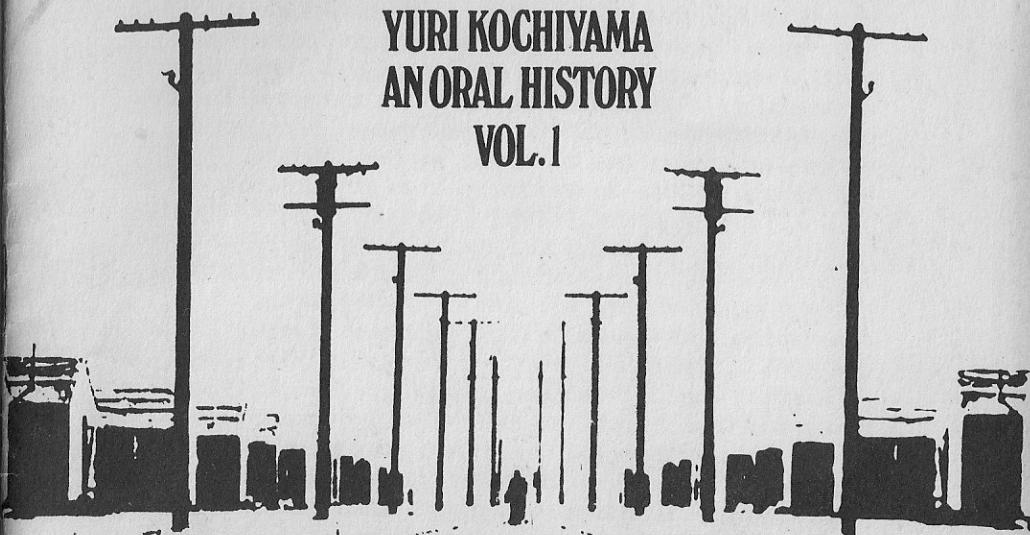


FISHMERCHANT'S DAUGHTER

YURI KOCHIYAMA
AN ORAL HISTORY
VOL. I



Beginning in 1976, the Community Documentation Workshop has been working to reconstruct the history of that part of the lower East Side that was once Peter Stuyvesant's farm and which, in the middle of the 19th century, became home for successive waves of emigrants in a process that has continued, with time out for several major wars, for almost a century and a half. The idea behind this developing work is to encourage ordinary people—workers, artists, artisans, tradesmen, parents, teachers, immigrants, emigres—to see themselves as part of history and as the active bearers of that history; to create a structure from which to reflect on the meaning of that history, and in the end to be supportive of the people—particularly the young people and the children—who live in the area now and are themselves experiencing growth and change. Another way of saying this is that CDW is interested in extending the meaning of culture.

The effort to extend the meaning of culture has always been a central and vital part of this history—from the earliest institutions created by working people to help them make sense of the world they had come to live in to the poetry readings and dance performances at St. Mark's—and though it is a complicated history, part of the energy behind it has been democratic. The argument here is not that, in matters of culture, the majority is always right; it is rather that everyone always has some right.

At the same time, part of the energy behind this history has to do with the struggle to sustain community against all the pressures working to undermine its values. Our bias here is expressed by George Dennison, who used to run a school on E. 5th Street for children who everyone else, in their professional capacities, had given up on. "I have wanted very much to say," Dennison writes in *The Lives of Children*, "that competence is impossible without love, for in this centralized, technological, expert-ridden age of ours it needs desperately to be said. To say it indicates, too, the direction of the essential change [that is needed]. We must transfer authority to where concern already exists. We must place it where there is nothing in the environment which will inevitably destroy the vital breath of concern. Authority must reside in the community. It must be local, homely, modest, sensitive. And it must be tied, once and for all, to the persons who not only do care, but will go on caring."

When CDW started publishing oral histories, it focused on stories of people who had worked and lived in the area, with the idea of developing, over the long-term, a kind of community

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I'm a Nisei, a second-generation Japanese-American. The first generation of Japanese, our parents, were called Issei. The third generation is called Sansei. I guess in the States the Japanese are in the fourth generation, and maybe it would be fifth and sixth generation in Hawaii, where the Japanese went before they came to the mainland.

I was born in 1921 in San Pedro, California, which is the port of Los Angeles. We lived in San Pedro proper, where not too many Japanese lived; it was a white working-class area. Most of the Japanese lived across the bay on Terminal Island, which was a fishing village: 98 percent Japanese and probably two percent Filipino seamen. The Japanese who weren't in fishing lived in the San Pedro hills and farmed.

My father worked in the fish market and owned his own company, and our lives were much, much more comfortable than the Japanese who lived on Terminal Island or in the San Pedro hills. I grew up — I think the term is still used — a *banana*, meaning yellow outside and white inside. I was very provincial and apolitical.

And I was church-oriented. I was drawn to the Christian religion thinking that it encouraged love and brotherhood, and justice and democracy — all of the things that the public schools usually put into children's heads. I accepted practically everything that I was told, so I guess you could say that I grew up very red, white, and blue, never questioning, or thinking of, what this country is really about.

We all studied American history in school, but I think most of us knew very little about it. We knew some dates and that's about it. I knew nothing of American history in relation to peoples of color. I didn't know about Africans who were brought here as slaves or what their life was like or how the United States had come to own Mexican land. I knew nothing about Puerto Ricans. I didn't know anything about American Indians, except what I saw in the movies. As for Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, Filipinos, I knew nothing of when or why they first came here or what their history in America was like. I knew nothing of the history of poor whites.



2

My mother and father both came from northern Japan: my mother from a place called Fukushima and my father from Iwate, in provinces that were next to each other. My father's father was a school principal and my mother taught in that school. My father came to America to see if he could make it and when he wanted to get married, his father suggested my mother and it was arranged. Her maiden name was Tsuma Sawaguchi. I don't know what her parents did; they lived in the countryside.

My father came over before World War 1 and my mother came after World War 1. She was a teacher of English and so she knew a little English when she arrived, but I doubt if my father did. Outside the house we were very American, inside we were very Japanese.

Even though Japanese people didn't all live in the same place, the Japanese community in California was quite cohesive. I think it had to do with the influence of the Japanese schools and the Issei leadership. They kept people close, whether they were the Los Angeles city folks, the Terminal Island fishing folks, or the San Pedro hills farm folks. In the worst periods of the Depression, when food was a major issue, the Japanese came together and helped each other. At least, that's what I heard. The fishing folks would give the farmers fish and the farmers would give the fishing people vegetables. Because my father was a fisherman, and because every day we had fish in the house, I didn't realize how badly off the whole country was.

For that matter, I didn't know about the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924 until the 1960s.

3

I think most of the people of San Pedro were families that came from overseas, predominantly from Europe. But even the European children, because they were mostly of Slavic and Italian background, had parents who could not speak English too well either. And Mexican parents spoke

Spanish. So we Japanese didn't feel so embarrassed that our parents couldn't speak English too well. It was only the Anglo-Saxon children who did not have a language problem.

It was a small town, but it was very cosmopolitan and there was a nice feeling between the people. I can't say that I felt that much racism — but then again there's such a difference between the school world and the business world, and I was still only in the school world. At least, the teachers were careful not to assert racism in the classroom. There were seven or eight grammar schools and I don't think there were more than two or three Japanese families in any of them.

It wasn't until junior high school that all the children from Terminal Island and the San Pedro hills came to the same school in San Pedro, and where all of us of Japanese background happened to meet each other. Of course, as soon as I started meeting the Japanese from the hills and from the fishing village, I knew that there was a difference between us. First of all, they could speak Japanese, whereas I could speak very little of it. Also I could tell by the things that they would tell me that life was much harsher where they lived.

4

In 1932, when I was 11, the Olympics were held at the Los Angeles Coliseum, and the Japanese Olympic team were billeted in our town. The athletic field was practically across the street from where we lived, and since there were only two Japanese families, my uncle and aunt's family and ours, and we had a lot of lawn space, they'd come over afterwards and spend the day on the lawn, and I was in heaven. Sports was everything to me then.

Of course, I did other things; like I took piano lessons. But I did that because my mother wanted me to. Japanese parents seemed to want their daughters to play the piano or violin but, I wasn't musically inclined. I loved poetry. Poetry and religion went together for me. The things that

seeped into me the deepest were from there. It's not that I dug everything; there were things that I didn't like. Like the 10 Commandments saying: "I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting iniquity on the third and fourth generations of them that hate me and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me." A passage like that always bothered me. I felt that this God is not a magnanimous God like I would expect a God to be. He should be more compassionate and understanding of people's frailties. But I dug the 10 Commandments, Beatitude, 23rd Psalm, and Paul's message in Corinthians about love. And the poets I liked probably wouldn't mean anything to anyone else today; they'd probably be considered corny. Back then, they were inspirational, especially poets like Edgar A. Guest.

I could relate to sports because I learned about teamwork and about sharing and that was exciting to me. There's a quote of General McArthur's about teamwork that stayed with me: "On the field of friendly strife are sown the seeds which in other years in other fields will bear the fruits of victory." I certainly think that's true and that sports can shape people's thinking in many ways especially in terms of teamwork, and giving all you've got, and sportsmanship.

The other thing that I remember from that period is from a half year that I attended the Los Angeles Presbytery, where they were giving a course on how to work with children. I remember the teacher saying — and it stayed with me throughout my life — "It is more important what you teach a child to love than what you teach a child to know."

5

In the 1930s, there was a lot of labor unrest; but all I remember of it was when they had those huge dock strikes, and then I remember it only from the Japanese point-of-view. They wouldn't allow Japanese into the union, and since Japanese were not union members, they were considered as 'nothing'. The man who drove the fishing truck for my father was beaten up several times. I would

hear my folks talk about what would be happening to Japanese who were pulling into that dock area during the strike. Japanese were not welcomed in the labor movement.

When I was 15, I started to work summers in a tomato cannery in Harbor City, which is only three, four miles out of San Pedro. It was the year the union started to organize the cannery. I'd hitchhike to the cannery with a girlfriend, who was Spanish. We must have been the youngest workers there and I guess we were a little bit too young to understand what was happening. People didn't take time to take us aside and explain why they were overturning tomato trucks, or why the bosses' families were targets. I remember seeing some union supporters or organizers grab this little kid who was about 7 years old, the son of a cannery owner, and watching the kid scream in fear; it was brutal. I was really more shocked at the tactics that were being used by the union than at the conditions that the union was fighting against. I guess my sympathies went to whoever was being brutalized.

On the other hand, I also know that when we worked at the cannery, people couldn't leave their places at the cutting table even if you cut a finger. You just had to keep working, and that was brutal, too. The tomatoes were coming through in buckets on a conveyor and if we left our place, somebody else would grab it. People needed jobs.

People would cut their fingers and be bleeding and all the blood would be going in with the tomatoes so that you couldn't tell the tomato juice from the blood, and when we would ask for bandages no one seemed to care. I didn't think even the unions cared that much, at least not about peoples of color because the fact is they didn't let the Japanese, Mexicans, or blacks join them; they were just left out of everything.

Back then Japanese could not find jobs except in Japan Town and China Town. It seemed impossible to get an ordinary job in town. Even when I finished junior college, I was one of the only Japanese-Americans who was working in San Pedro proper and I heard it was the first time that a five-and-dime store hired a Japanese. Woolworth hired me where three other five-and-dime stores wouldn't even let me make out an application.

The reason I went to Woolworth's was I saw that there

was a Mexican working there; she was a good friend of mine from school. She said she was the first Mexican so why didn't I try; they might hire a Japanese. Well they hired me, but only as a fill-in for summer vacations, Christmas, Easter, and Saturdays. Pay for the course for all Japanese was either working for a vegetable stand or doing domestic work.

6

At home, we spoke only Japanese and my folks entertained Japanese people. My father not only owned this fish market, but he supplied fish to Japanese steamships that came in and he would bring ship officers home for dinner. And every time they would come, we would have to be on our best behavior and greet them with a bow the way Japanese children do.

7

On the morning of December 7, 1941, I was driving into town to teach Sunday school, as I had done for years. I hadn't turned on the radio, so I didn't know that anything was happening. Then I saw a classmate of mine trying to hitch-hike but in an Army uniform, which was an even bigger surprise. So I honked the horn and yelled to him: "Let me give you a lift. What are you doing?" And he said, "Don't you know there's an alert?" I said, "An alert? What's that?" And he said that all those in the Armed Services had to report to their bases. I said, "If it's not too far, I can give you a lift." He was going to Ft. McArthur. I told him to hop in and we took off. Then he said, "Don't you know that Pearl Harbor in Hawaii is being bombed by Japan?"

The news had been on the radio since 8 o'clock; I was really shocked to hear about it. I left my classmate off and went on to the Sunday school. The class I had was made up

of 12- and 13-year-old junior high school girls, who were a very lively bunch. But as soon as I walked into the church, I could feel the difference. It was something that I had never felt before. It wasn't just the class, it was the whole Sunday school, whether they were teachers or students. It was a kind of pall.

The superintendent dismissed us early from class and we all crowded into the assembly hall, where he asked if the students were aware that a territory of the United States was being bombed. I think what happened at that point was that, for the first time, they realized I was Japanese. Before, maybe they just thought of me as an American of Asian extraction. Beyond that it didn't matter to them what I was. Then, all of a sudden, they realized I was part of an enemy country.

Ten or 11 kids packed into the car and I drove them home as usual, although they were all quiet, and I was home by about 11. I wasn't home 10 minutes when I saw three tall white men coming down our front steps. I went to the door and they pulled out their wallets and handed me a card which said: Federal Bureau of Investigation, and asked me if Mr. Seichi Nakahara lived there. And I said yes, that's my father. They asked, where is he? And I said, well, he's sleeping in the back. He had just come from the hospital, where he had had an ulcer operation. Without saying another word, they rushed in and everything happened within a matter of two or three minutes. They told my father to put on his bathrobe and slippers and they were out of there. I didn't have a chance to say anything to him, or to ask where he was being taken, or why.

My mother was down the block at my aunt's and uncle's and I called her. She came rushing home and started making calls. I don't know who she called; probably a lawyer and friends. We didn't know anything for days. Then a lawyer called back to say he had located my father in a federal penitentiary on Terminal Island.

At the beginning, we weren't quite sure where Pearl Harbor was, but by listening to all the radio reports, it started to become clear. The radio gave hourly reports of the dog fights, and also reported how many ships were hit: I think practically the whole U.S. Navy was in Pearl Harbor at the time of the raid. The number of dead was huge because I think every ship in the harbor was bombed. But strangely, very few officers. It wasn't until later that they found that most officers had been on shore. The night before, the officers were partying in Honolulu. The Japanese must have known that.

By the end of that week, the feelings towards the Japanese living in the United States was filled with distrust and hatred and, of course, it was fanned by racism. People, on the West Coast, were in a state of frenzy, wondering right away what should be done with so many Japanese who lived up and down the coast. Real estate people, businessmen, bankers, Congressmen: they were all coming out with statements calling for the government to do something about the Japanese living on the West Coast because it was a strategic area, a military zone.

In the meantime, my older brother — who was three years older than me — was trying to run my father's fish market, but the banks froze our account and so he had to close the place. (The fish business had been getting worse through the years anyway.) Then my twin brother called from the University of California at Berkeley, where he was a student, and said that nobody wanted the Japanese on the campus.

What made it even more complicated was that the ticket agents at the bus depot and the train station were refusing to sell him tickets. We said just come anyway you can. We could understand what it must have been like on campus because in San Pedro it was very bad.

All the Japanese businesses throughout California were folding. Those with jobs were losing them. Students were quitting school. Families were not sure what to do and so many people had been picked up.

When my mother finally found out where my father was

being held, the first thing she asked the authorities to do was to let him be transferred to a hospital until he could get well. That's all she worked for in those first days. She must have sent telegrams to everybody from the City Council to the President, but it took a couple of weeks to get a response.

Finally my father was taken out of prison and put in the hospital in San Pedro; it was the same ward where they placed seamen who had come back from the Pacific. My father's bed was the only one in the ward that had a sheet around it with a sign: "Prisoner of War."

My mother went to see my father as often as was permitted, but my brothers and I weren't allowed to visit him until January 13, when they put him into a separate room. By then, he was dying. He was emaciated. And his mind seemed to be deteriorating. I guess maybe the hours and hours of interrogation from December 7 to the time we had seen him, which was over a month, could have done something to his mind. He looked at me and said, "Who beat you up?" I said, "I'm okay; no one's touched me. I even still have my job." But I guess in his mind I was beaten up.

The brother who had been at Berkeley had come home and immediately joined the Army. It seems strange now, looking back: here was my father, taken in by the FBI, and yet no one stopped my brother at the Selective Service Board. He passed and got into the Service just like that. My father saw him in his uniform, and cowered, thinking he was a guard.

A week later, on the 20th, we got word from the hospital that my father was being released that day. We were overjoyed, but also wary. It turned out that the reason they were letting him go was because he was dying. He came home around 5 P.M. and the next morning around 8 A.M. the nurse awakened us, saying he was dead. When he came home, there was no way to communicate; he couldn't talk.

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He made only gutteral sounds and we didn't know if he could hear. We put our hands over his eyes to see if he could see; there was no way even to know if he could see. All he did was to make gutteral sounds until he passed. So there was no communication at the end.

But there was communication from the government. As soon as the FBI heard the report of his death, we got a phone call from them and were told that anyone who came to the funeral service would be under surveillance. The Japanese people came in from Los Angeles, 20 miles away despite a five-mile travel ban. And, some of the fishing folks who were still left in Terminal Island and the farmers from the San Pedro hills came, too. Even our Caucasian neighbors attended. And sure enough, the FBI was right there in front of the funeral parlor. My father was 60.

10

By the end of January, it was in the papers that President Roosevelt was considering the evacuation of all Japanese from the West Coast. The congressional committee established to determine the history and background of the Japanese-American West Coast community and whether they could have committed acts of sabotage or espionage had concluded, after I don't know how many weeks of concentrated study, that nothing negative had been done by the Japanese and the findings were reported to Congress. But the government didn't take the report into consideration. President Roosevelt issued Resolution 9066, which called for all Japanese-Americans from the Western Command, which included California, Oregon, and Washington to be moved out of the strategic area.

At the time, I am sure that the Roosevelt Administration had discussed the evacuation, but they hadn't yet come up with the exact ways of doing it. In two areas, Bainbridge Island in Washington, and Terminal Island in San Pedro, the people were given only 48 hours to pack. You hardly hear of Bainbridge because there weren't that many

Japanese there, but Terminal Island was a sizeable Japanese colony. What the Japanese went through there we will never forget.

After the stories about the Terminal Islanders having to leave their homes appeared in the newspapers, hundreds if not thousands of people — vultures — went over there to take what they could from them. The Japanese were just coming into a position where some of the seasoned fishermen were able to buy their own fishing boats and fishing nets. Can you imagine the tremendous cost of such equipment? They lost it all.

Even though the Japanese houses on Terminal Island all looked alike from the outside, the houses inside were furnished nicely and were very individual: the people put their life's earnings into their quarters. Whatever they had in their kitchens, their living rooms, their bedrooms, they had to sell dirt-cheap. They would sell a whole living room set for \$10; they practically gave away radios and ice-boxes because the vultures wanted them for almost nothing.

In December, most males 18 and over who were involved in fishing on Terminal Island had been taken away. They went to camps in Montana or to the Dakotas, I think. So by the time the Island was evacuated, most of the men were already gone. When the government ordered an inventory of every store, the Terminal Island people had every kid who could count, from seven years old and up, helping.

What was so sad was that the Japanese people were afraid of keeping any of their heirlooms in fear that the government would link them that much more with Japan. Beautiful art works, including the cherished Japanese festival dolls, were tossed into the ocean.

11

Most of the Terminal Islanders found refuge in Japanese churches and schools in southern California, and at farm houses — sleeping on the floor. Some found lost relatives. Their removal was probably the harshest uprootment of all the Japanese; they were the first ones to go and they had

the least time to do it. The rest of us — in San Pedro, Long Beach, Torrance, Wilmington — didn't have to start moving until April 1, which gave us over a month to arrange for the care of property.

My family didn't want to sell our house and we were lucky. We had the kind of neighbors who took responsibility for renting our home while we were interned. Several Navy families stayed in our home, and our friends next door, the Stevens, saw to it that the furniture was cared for and that the grounds were tended.

The war was escalating and more and more men were going into the Service, and there were more and more injuries being sustained in the Pacific. Everybody's life was changing across the country. Headlines about the possibility of a West Coast invasion or Japanese sabotage were blaring and hysteria was increasing; the fear of the Japanese was intense.

And yet pre-war Japanese had leaned over backwards to become Americans, trying to do what Americans and America seemed to want of them. I don't think the public was aware of that.

On April 1, all persons of Japanese descent were taken to assembly centers as a first step in removing them to the camps. The assembly centers were either fairgrounds or racetracks. The smallest ones probably housed as few as 400 or 500 people; the largest, where we were sent, was Santa Anita Racetrack.

We were told to take only what we could carry, which meant essentials: clothes, bedding, a few utensils. We were lucky in that we didn't have little babies to carry. There were many families who couldn't carry much because they had little children and most of what they took was for them. They told us, too, no contraband: no radios, no cameras, and no knives, not even for the kitchen.

The only Japanese I can think of who didn't have to go were those who were tuberculosis patients. They were sent to a sanitarium somewhere else in California. People who were recuperating from any other illness were sent to an assembly center as soon as they could be moved.

When we went into Santa Anita, each family was billeted in a horse stall. We went in there with nothing but the smell of horse manure.

12

It was amazing what people did in six, seven months. The women ordered material through the Sears & Roebuck or Montgomery Ward catalogues and made curtains, table covers, and bed spreads. They made chairs and tables out of cardboard cartons. They decorated walls. They planted gardens. In front of the horse stalls, before we left, there were plants growing, green coming up, and flowers blossoming.

The assembly centers were organized as self-sufficient communities as much as possible and everybody took part in building it, just as in the inland camps later. We ran our own mess halls, schools, post office, canteens and hospital just as they were organized outside. Many of us who volunteered as hospital workers and helped set up the hospital didn't have much training, but we learned through trial and error. The doctors were Nisei; so were the registered nurses.

There weren't any wards at the beginning. The hospital was set up in the track's garage, all the vehicles were removed, the garage floor was scrubbed clean, beds were brought in, and everybody was just thrown together in one large area — from infants to elderly folks — whether they were suffering from chicken pox, or a broken arm, or senility, or were pregnant.

Some people were mentally ill. Others became so. The experience of the five months from December 7 to the time we went into the assembly centers was just more than a lot of the Japanese could endure. Tragedies and losses, both material and in human terms, can never be truly assessed. The doctors, who worked 24 hours on and 24 hours off, slept in the same area with the hodge-podge of patients.

Later a more appropriate space was found. It was an elongated, single-story wooden frame building where the horses had been curried. It became a hospital, with wards for men, women, children, and infants, and it was used like that until Santa Anita assembly center folded.

Most everyone over 18 and reasonably healthy worked. There were three categories set up: skilled, unskilled, and professional. The unskilled received \$8 a month, the skilled \$12, and the professionals \$16 to \$19. I think most people

were listed as unskilled — hospital workers, mess hall, laundry, latrines, commissary — and we received \$8. I guess the skilled people were those who had some kind of training — mechanics, cooks, truckdrivers, typists, mail clerks; they received \$12. All of the school teachers, and the women who worked as top secretaries in the administration building, and registered nurses were professionals and received \$16. The doctors and lawyers received the highest pay, \$19.

Seeing the camp folks work together, confronting problems, overcoming difficulties, I couldn't help but admire their industriousness, their perserverance, and their creativity. It may sound strange — but I fell in love with my own people there. It was the beginning of a search for my identity.

13

In October 1942, all the assembly centers disbanded and sent their people inland to permanent camps. At least they were considered permanent for the duration of the war. They were located in mountain areas, deserts, and swamplands: not the nicest kinds of places for family life. Climatically those camps were much rougher than anything we'd experienced in California. I don't think many of us were prepared for the change, especially for the winters. We didn't have any notion of how cold a place could get.

They shipped us off on train convoys — cattle cars; they were trains that had seen better days. I had never been across the country, so it was a revelation to see how large this country is. Hundreds of miles of empty space before hitting a town. It took four, five days to get to where we were going and we were never allowed out. In North Platte, Nebraska, a troop train pulled in on the next track while we were stopping. It was full of young GIs being sent somewhere. They were young men; we were young women. "Hey babe, what's your name?" Nationality or race didn't seem to matter to either. They quickly scribbled their names and addresses and asked us to write to them. We

had no addresses; no destination. We grabbed the pieces of paper they threw to us.

On the other side of our train, the people from North Platte were asking, "Who are you? Do you speak English?" "Of course, we speak English," we'd say, "we're Americans." You could see they had a hard time dealing with that. One man came up to the window where my mother and I were sitting. "Could you give me your name and address, I want to correspond with anyone. Here's my name." He threw us his calling card: his last name was Hughes. He said, "This is North Platte." I said, "Yes, we see the signs." He said, "Well, you know, Japanese live here. If we correspond, I could tell you more about it."

We corresponded for several years. When the war was over, one Japanese-American from North Platte became famous: Ben Kuroki. He was a Goldwater Republican.

Anyway, we finally reached Jerome, Arkansas, on the borderline of Texas, Arkansas, and Mississippi. It was literally a swampland, surrounded by forest. That was to be home.

We lived in barracks: 12 barracks to a block, and in the center of the block was a mess hall. The block house was the washing area with toilets, bath, and laundry room. When winter arrived, we organized in teams to collect firewood. The men went into the forest and chopped down the trees and the women did some of the sawing and distributing. In some blocks, the women did the same work that the men did, which amazed me. It made me think of Volga boatmen — all these women lugging these huge trees that they would cut down, dragging them in like teams of horses, almost rhythmically. They were from the farm area and used to hard work.

This kind of working together was an eye-opener for me. The day-to-day experience that we were going through was awakening me to a certain reality. Although one doesn't have to be political to be concerned about the community, concern for the community made one political. It was very clear that whatever we were going to do in that place, sink or swim, it had to be done together.

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One of the craziest incidents that took place in camp was when a Piper Cub with three people aboard crash-landed in the camp right near our hospital area. You can imagine how surprised those people were. Here were these three white guys, I'm sure they were Arkansans, crashing in an area where there were only Japanese living.

The Japanese rushed over to where the plane came down and wanted to help. None of the people in the plane was seriously hurt, but when they saw all these Japanese coming toward them they were stunned; they couldn't believe it. They couldn't figure out how Japanese could be in Arkansas.

They were so frightened. Caucasian hospital personnel arrived right away and explained the situation, but they didn't want any Japanese to go near them, and they didn't want to go to the camp hospital because it had mostly Japanese workers. They demanded to be taken to Little Rock 100 miles away. It was a glimpse of a racism, but it was sort of funny.

On the other hand, there were whites, and other non-Japanese people who traveled long distances to see their friends in camp. I remember one boy — he looked like a nine or 10-year-old red-head, who traveled from California to see a classmate; he came by himself. Also friends of camp residents traveled long distances. Two pen-pals I had — one from St. Paul, Minnesota, and the other from Little Rock, Arkansas, visited me. The Minnesotan wanted to be a Christian missionary and go to Japan. After the war, I heard he went to Japan. Strangely, he ended up being converted to Buddhism, and he is now somewhere back in the states — a Buddhist monk.

I remember, too, seeing a Chinese man visiting his wife. If you were a non-Japanese married to a Japanese, you did not have to go into a camp. That was voluntary, although a lot of husbands and wives who were non-Japanese did come in with their Japanese spouses. This Chinese man came to visit his Japanese wife. There was a table between them. He wanted to hold his baby. The baby was about a year old and sadly the guard came over and said that nothing could

go across the table. "But it's my own child," the Chinese man said. "Sorry," the guard said, "but those are the rules."

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There were many community activities in camp, both for the Issei elderly and for the children. There were also sports and recreation programs for teenagers, Sunday schools, church services, occasional films, cultural programs and, once, a beauty contest. The young woman chosen "Miss Jerome Camp" was a beautiful Mexican-Japanese.

In Sunday school, which I kept teaching, I kept putting it into the kids' heads that what they were going through was a learning experience so that none of them would have this terrible feeling against the government, or try to revenge themselves on the people who made us go into camp. I had all these inspirational sayings from the poetry I'd been reading: I had all of my favorites written down and I used them in my classes.

The kids were amazing; they spoke freely about how they felt about things. They really went through changes in the camps. Before the camps, mealtimes were where families could get together and speak about whatever was happening. In camp, there was no such thing as families eating together. Everybody ate at the mess hall; children ate with their friends, and parents lost control of them. They became rebellious, trying to find a little more independence.

But where they were getting independence, they were losing that closeness with their parents and the parents didn't know what their kids were thinking. In some ways the kids needed to be with other people besides their families. But it really made family life disintegrate.

The younger kids worried a lot about school. Would they be able to keep up with the kids back home once they started classes again? Were they learning the things that they should be learning at their grade level? How would Americans respond to them when they went home?

The older kids were less anxious about these things. By the time we were in the relocation camps, the young males, 18 and over, were allowed to go out of camp for seasonal jobs, picking nuts, or fruit, or sugarbeets; there was a shortage of workers in many parts of the country. Students who finished high school applied for college through the WRA Student Relocation Program. The Quakers helped many kids get scholarships and opened a lot of college doors.

After the first year, young people were relocating to all kinds of jobs — as domestics, factory workers, office help — in the large cities like Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland and New York. Seabrook Farms, a plant for frozen foods, recruited hundreds of Japanese families to southern New Jersey, where large numbers stayed on for years.

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Nisei GIs stationed in Army camps in Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Georgia, Tennessee, Illinois and Indiana would visit our camp all the time. Many had families and relatives in Jerome. And two of the largest camps with Niseis were nearby: Camp Shelby in Mississippi and Camp Robinson in Arkansas. In fact, one time, when President Roosevelt went to Camp Robinson to review the troops there, the camp commander sent out a memo to all the unit heads telling them to gather all the Nisei GIs and march them as far away from the President as they could as a security measure. That's how much the Army trusted the Nisei soldiers.

Anyway, because of all those visits, and because the Nisei soldiers in the South were not particularly welcome in the regular USO, we got together, young women my age, and formed our own USO in camp. We didn't have a dance band, but we played records of the bands that were popular, and we became pretty well-known.

One night, in late November of 1943, when I was on the 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. shift, logging the names of the Nisei GIs who were visiting the camp, I met Bill Kochiyama. He said

he was from the "island," and I thought he meant Maui in Hawaii. No, he said, Manhattan.

You didn't meet many Nisei GIs from New York City. Most of them were from California or Hawaii, Manhattan! He was a very handsome and distinctive-looking city-slicker. As corny as it may sound, it was love at first sight for me.

Bill was a member of the Nisei Combat Team, the 442nd Regiment, that went to Italy and France to become the most highly decorated military unit for its size in U.S. history. He was a volunteer from the camp in Topaz, Utah — one of 1,500 mainland Niseis who volunteered for combat from behind barbed wires. He had been visiting family out West when the Presidential order against the Japanese was issued and he landed in Topaz.

We saw each other three times before he left with his unit in April 1944 and we promised to wait for each other. It was a common wartime romance, with our courtship through the mails, except ours was one that had a happy ending. So many girl friends of mine had their hopes shattered with the notice that the one they were waiting for was killed in action.

Actually we tried to get married before Bill shipped out. We went through all the paperwork, my mother had given her approval, and we had arranged for the chaplain of Bill's outfit to marry us. But on the morning of the wedding day, the captain of Bill's outfit received a telegram from Bill's father that said he wanted the wedding cancelled.

It was such a jolt and I was terribly hurt, at first. Bill's father said he would not allow him to marry until he met me. It was this thing about pride, especially in regard to the son. This was his only son and he wanted to be sure that he marry the right kind of person, not just some fly-by-night.

Bill's father was a domestic worker for a family on Park Avenue, but he came from a samurai family and was full of tradition. My family came from the same background, so I knew what it was about. But what I hated about that tradition was the place it gave to pride. To me it was false pride. When I would go to J-town, I loved to see what the Japanese call *ogenie*, the way they bow to each other. But what I could see, too, even when I was young, was that tradition required you to bow lower to people who had more

prestige in life. You didn't show the same courtesy to a fisherman or a farmer as you did to a doctor. I didn't like it.

Bill finally convinced me that although his father had a lot of pride, he was humble about it and not arrogant, and that I would see it when I met him. As you grow older, you see that there is a difference between arrogance and pride. There is no such thing as a simple person.

After Bill left, I worked in the Aloha USO in Hattiesburg, Mississippi — which was started through the influence of a Chinese-American from Honolulu, Hung Wai Ching, the director of the Nuuane YMCA, who was aware of the racism in the South and was able to get the help of Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy to do it — and in Minneapolis, first trying to set up a service program for Nisei GIs, then doing part-time domestic work, working in a laundry, and waitressing.

17

The government began closing the relocation camps in the fall of 1945 after the war had ended. By then, my mother had been transferred to Camp Rohwer in McGhee, Arkansas. The government had closed Jerome camp when the number of internees dwindled; so many had gone out to work or to school. By the time I went to McGhee from Minnesota to pick up my mother and head back to the West Coast, the camp was made up mostly of the elderly and mothers with very young children. We took the train back to San Pedro.

It was an emotional but very happy journey. The Isseis were overjoyed to finally leave camp. We went the southern route through Texas. Everybody was quite excited and wondering about what we should anticipate; whether there would be ill-feeling. Although the war was over, the feeling against the Japanese was still very strong. Maybe even stronger than before. A lot of the people on the West Coast did not want the Japanese back and there was one incident after another as the Japanese returned.

Our family was lucky. The neighbors next door never wavered in helping us and, when they got word that we were coming home, they told the people who were staying there to find some other quarters. But I know of other Japanese families whose farms were burned down and it was very, very difficult. I remember one family whose home was burned and no one knew how to tell them. Their friends kept procrastinating until finally the Japanese said, look, just drive us over there. On the way, they were finally told: Don't be shocked, but there's nothing there; just charred wood.

One of my Nisei friends called and told me how, when she went to our place thinking we were already home, the woman who was living there just opened the door and slammed it in her face when she saw her. Other Japanese said they had come over to San Pedro to see if we were there and, when they didn't find us, went to shop. They went to get groceries across the street from our house, but the shopkeeper didn't want to wait on them. When I heard this, I was furious. This was the town that I loved and that I kept bragging about, that was a haven with no racism. I learned about my *beloved* hometown when I began looking for a job.

The only work I looked for was waitressing because I was just waiting for Bill to come home. Being a waitress, I could take off as soon as I needed to. Job-hunting wasn't all that easy.

I think I tried every single restaurant in San Pedro, on all the main drags, and not one place would hire me. They said, "If you're Japanese, forget it." Or else it was, "If you're not in the union, don't even try here." How the heck could I be in the union when I had just gotten there and they didn't let the Japanese in the union anyway?

Finally I went to Skid Row. I remember Walter Winchell saying that San Pedro's Skid Row was the roughest in the world. At least, I thought, that would be one place that would take anybody. It was rougher than I imagined. I guess because the war was just over and people regarded us as Japanese not Americans, they treated us like we were the enemy.

The first weeks were the worst. I'd go out looking for a job every single day, and even when I actually got jobs I would last anywhere from an hour to before-the-night-was-out. I would take night jobs starting six in the evening until three or four in the morning because that's all that was available. Every night, as soon as a few people would start complaining — "Is that a Jap?" — the boss would say, "sorry, I can't keep you; you're hurting business."

First time around, most places didn't want to even take a chance. But gradually, because they were so hard up for waitresses for those hours, I became employable. They said, "Okay, you can stay until we get too many complaints, and then you've got to go."

The first job that I got I was so excited! I rushed home to tell my mother and get a uniform together. And I made it through the first night. I felt so proud. But when I finished, the boss said, "Don't come back, your presence here made me lose two of my regular waitresses." He said they absolutely refused to work with a *Jap*. I was so busy, I hadn't even noticed.

Every day I'd work a few hours, until I'd get the 'go' sign. One time, I went into a restaurant for the first time, and every person sitting in the place looked at me, rose up, and yelled, "What's this? Do I see a *Jap*?"

Some of the places were nice. The owners would say, "If you can take it, just stay here until someone throws a cup of coffee at you." But that would happen, and then the boss would say, "No, you'd better go, for your own sake."

They were pretty grim places, and it was a pretty grim time, but it had one redeeming virtue: I got to see old friends; classmates, hometown athletes, neighbors. They were all coming home from the war. After being away for almost four years, that felt wonderful. Many of the girls — the ones I had in Sunday school or in the Girl Scouts, who were 13 or 14 when I left — were 17, 18, and attending USO dances right next to where I was working. They were as surprised to see me working in those dives as I was seeing them

because I still thought of them as little kids. They had become young women.

Strangely, I couldn't help but feel that the ones who were nicest to me were the servicemen who had actually fought against the Japanese. The ones who were the worst were the ones who had worked in the war plants. Also, it was interesting which of the local people were the most supportive. Some I hardly knew, and yet when they found out that I was getting off work at 3 or 4 in the morning, which was sort of a dangerous hour, they would come by in their cars and pick me up. Some Indian brothers used to go out of their way to give me a ride home.

So there were a lot of nice experiences. And then the YW called and asked if I would do some work with them. I'd go with the Y to the outskirts of San Pedro and parts of Long Beach where the air strips were being used to quarter returning Japanese who had nowhere to go. They were living in trailer camps — and some of these seemed very crude; worse than conditions in the internment camps, especially when it rained. I wondered back then when this harsh way of life would end for the Japanese. I still wonder how the elderly coped with it.

At home, we had Isseis who had nowhere to go staying with us. Then there were Nisei GIs who were returning from the South Pacific and didn't know where their families were. It was hard for returning Japanese, whether from the camps or overseas. Every night different people would stay over until they found a relative or friend. All the Japanese who were fortunate in already having a place opened their doors likewise.

Finally, at the end of January, I left. Bill had come home. It was a cold bus ride to New York, my first taste of real winter weather. But how warming it was to know we were finally going to be together. We got married on February 9, 1946.

I loved New York the moment I arrived; it was the people I loved. I had never seen such teeming humanity. It seemed like they came from all over the world. You heard every language on the street. San Pedro had seemed cosmopolitan because there were Japanese and different Europeans and Mexicans, but it was limited. In New York, everybody in the world was here, it seemed like.

Of course, the subways frightened me at first: the noise. But sitting in the subway and seeing all these different faces was very exciting. It was just that sudden: I loved it. And then, too, it seemed so strange. I had lived such a different life in California: we had a house, eight rooms, well-furnished. But here, you were lucky to get a sleeping room and that's how we started out. We got a tiny place on 84th Street; I don't even know how my husband found it. The super was an old German who was very nice. We were about the only young people living there and we thought it would be hard to make friends. Usually they say New York is so cold, especially in a rooming house, where people don't talk to each other. But in the first week, we got to meet everyone on our floor and we spent time with all of them. They were all older people and every one of them told us about their lives.

Next door to us was a Jewish woman who had terrible experiences in Europe and she felt lucky to have gotten out. A little Greek man who owned a restaurant told us of his experiences, too. Greece, of course, was one of the countries that was a battleground. It seemed like everybody there who we met had had lives that were just one uprootment and upheaval after another. We had a rapport with them right away; we had just experienced it ourselves, and it was exciting just exchanging our stories. There was one Issei man, who hadn't talked with any young Japanese for so long. I guess, sadly, a lot of young people avoided the older people. But we spent whatever time we could with him because we were interested in finding out more about what the Issei went through.

And then, too, what was fascinating was finding out more about my husband's father, my father-in-law. He had never

wanted anyone to know he was a domestic worker, especially the Japanese nationals, the Kaisha people (businessmen), because they look down on those doing menial work. During the war he said Caucasians thought he was the Chinese Ambassador. He was always impeccably and elegantly dressed. Yet he did all the subservient kinds of work: the cleaning, the cooking; he even played the role of butler. For all the time he was here in the United States, that's what he did for different families. But outside of his domestic work, his knowledge of art was amazing, and he also had an enviable collection. He was also a skilled photographer. But his most unusual talent was his extraordinary rapport with humming birds. Even the Audubon Society and National Geographic went to him for consultation.

He had come to the States by way of England. His father was a doctor, and he wanted to be an artist. So you can imagine how rough it must have been for him psychologically to realize that all he could do here, because of the language barrier and racism, was domestic work. That was the story for a lot of Japanese Issei on the East Coast; they got caught up in domestic work and never left it.

On the West Coast, it was different. For one thing, there were so many more Japanese. I was told that every Japanese who came into the country did domestic work in the beginning. But after they saved their money, they would go into farming, fishing, gardening, or own a small business in J-town. They also sent for wives; many were picture brides. I guess it was too far to bring them all the way to New York. The Japanese here on the East Coast were isolated from each other. Many of the men married European women also in domestic work.

My husband went back to school on the GI Bill and, a month after I got here, I was waitressing at Chock Full O' Nuts. I like waitressing. It keeps you close to people. Chock Full O' Nuts was a well-known chain; known for its cleanliness, good prices, and black workers. It was my first experience working with blacks and getting to know black people. I felt I was learning a lot just being there.

There happened to be two men there who were ex-GIs

like my husband and who had coincidentally trained in the same camp. When I said I didn't understand why black soldiers never came into our center, they asked, "Where were you located?" I said, "222 Pine." They said, "Pine? That's the main drag. We couldn't walk the main drags in the South." I didn't know that; I was stunned.

Then I started to recall the scenes in the South. The only time I would see blacks anywhere would be at the bus stations, or the train stations, but other than that I never really saw them. The more I thought about it, the more I realized how little I saw and how little I knew about blacks and about the South.

When I was in the USO, one of my jobs was visiting Japanese-American soldiers who had been injured. I had gone to 14 different hospitals in 12 different states mostly in the South and I didn't realize it at the time but the black soldiers were not in the same wards as whites even though the Asians were. So a lot of things began to surface.

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Our first child, Billy, was born on May day 1947. He took us into that exciting world of parenthood, where anything and everything is bound to happen. He was the first of six children we had: two girls and four boys. Each was our teacher, helping us to grow into better parents. Like any field, parenthood is a learning process, and the Amsterdam Project houses on the West Side was our college in the late '40s and through the '50s.

When we first moved in, the ratio of whites to blacks, Puerto Ricans and others was about 60 to 40. Before the first five years were up, the ratio had changed drastically to 80 percent black and Puerto Rican and 20 percent white. There were only two other Asian families there. In fact, very few Asians applied for project housing.

Our family life was quiet but extended. Old friends dropped by constantly: internment camp friends, hometown friends, New York friends, student friends from Hawaii and the West Coast, GIs. Friday and Saturday nights

became open house. We really didn't have the money to go out and it was a cheap way of socializing. From a dozen people, it quickly grew to a crowd of 50 jammed into a small apartment. When it hit 100, people were out in the hall and down the stairwell.

Then we thought if we are going to have these open houses, it would be worthwhile for people not just to socialize but to get something more out of it. So we started programming things. We would look in the paper to see who might be in town and try to get them to come by and talk with us. If we heard that someone from Africa was going to speak at Columbia, we'd get in touch with him and invite him over. Then we would let people know about it and they'd come to hear him. We had people coming by from all over the world.

By 1950, the U.S. was already involved in another war, in Korea, and there were so many GIs in town from Hawaii who had nowhere to go that we figured we ought to organize Asians and Hawaiians to do something constructive. We started with the Japanese first because we knew them and we called it NSO: Nisei Service Organization. But within a short while, we started meeting lots of young Chinese, so we changed the name to Nisei-Sino Service Organization.

We set it up so that Friday night was open house just for them and Saturday night for others. Others included anybody and everybody: foreign students, aspiring actors/actresses, singers and dancers, professional athletes, out-of-town visitors, neighbors. We provided services trying to find jobs, housing, medical help, and information about schools. And we started getting the names of people who were willing to put up a serviceman for a night or so.

Once we had seven GIs sleeping on the floor of the living room. We had run out of blankets, but they didn't care; they just wanted floor space. Another time we called a family from Hawaii to see if they could put up a few GIs, and they said, "yes, if you don't send too many; we already have 17." The Hawaiians' motto, of course, is "Go for broke."

We were surrounded by wonderful neighbors and such generosity. When Bill first finished school, it took him nine months to find a job. Everybody in the building shared their food with us. Sometimes it was a loaf of bread or fruits or a vegetable. The Catholic families gave us whatever

meat was left over on Thursday. A neighbor, who worked at the A&P, gave us cans of food that had lost their wrappers or were bent. Two people who owned a vegetable stand gave us potatoes and onions. And Bill's father who worked as a domestic, and all of his friends who were domestics working for wealthy families, would bring us bags of groceries, often with exotic food like canned turtle meat and artichoke hearts. When we had open house, the people who came provided the beverages and chasers. In fact, they'd bring over bottled beer and soda instead of cans so that we could get the deposit money, which also helped us get by.

It was about that time that we started to keep our eyes open on what was happening on the civil rights front. In 1954, we read the decision on school desegregation that the Supreme Court handed down. The following year, Rosa Parks refused to sit in the back of the bus in Montgomery, Alabama, and started a movement. When the Alabama bus boycott was on, we had a lot of people coming to the open house nights to speak about it.

Then in 1955, there was Little Rock, Arkansas: the incident at Central High School. When that exploded, the papers listed the names of the nine children involved and we recognized the name of one of them. She used to visit her aunt, who lived right above us, when she was very young. When the NAACP invited the "Little Rock 9" to New York, this girl's aunt let me go with her to visit the teenagers who had come and I was very impressed with the concern everybody there showed. People were fighting for things that we had taken for granted. I started to realize that I needed to fight for my civil rights, too.

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It was just about the same time as Little Rock that my family and I became involved with the Hiroshima maidens: 25 atom-bombed women who had come to the U.S. for plastic surgery. The top American plastic surgeons were volunteering their skills at Mt. Sinai Hospital. Hearing the

stories of these disfigured young women was horrifying. Coming to know them was humbling. Their spirit was inspiring.

Most people, when they thought about Hiroshima, saw only the mushroom cloud; they couldn't imagine the horrendous sight of the victims, or the agony of their suffering. It was August when the bombs fell. They told us of men, women, children staggering about nude, hairless, bleeding, skin hanging, or blackened, and some crushed under their houses. Many people jumped into the river to drown themselves. Those who lived were lying about with maggots crawling out of their eyes, noses, mouths. Flies buzzing everywhere. Somehow these women survived, but their skin was totally burned, their faces contorted grotesquely later with keloids as they healed. They said they wanted to die, but they couldn't. I guess life hangs on tenaciously.

There was no medication. The only thing there was were dead bodies. They told us that the bones of the dead were mashed and the powdery remnant was used as an antiseptic. It was the only medication until medical provisions were brought in.

The 25 women had been screened and picked for treatment here. The government had certain criteria for those who came. They didn't want to bring the worst cases, so as not to offend or repulse the American public.

At first, the women didn't want anyone to visit them. Then they agreed to let older people visit. Then they brought it down to 40, and I fit into that age group. They didn't want to see those of their own age; they didn't want to be reminded by an attractive young woman of the normal life they were going to be denied. When they appeared on television, they were placed behind screens so the public could not see them.

We were consumed by that experience. It was a whole new world to us to know what they went through. So when we turned again to what was happening with the civil rights movement, our feelings had deepened.

By the time the Hiroshima maidens had left New York, I was pregnant with my fifth child, and we decided to move into a bigger place. We found an apartment in the Manhattanville Housing Project in Harlem and moved in

on a very cold day in December of 1960. The day is indelibly marked in my memory. The city had its worst blizzard. Cars were snowbound; they weren't even supposed to be on the street. But some friends rented a U-Haul and moved the big stuff and others just grabbed handfuls of books, pots, pans, clothes, and came up by subway. We cooked up some food in our old place, brought it uptown on the subway, and had a party. We weren't going to let a blizzard stop us.

autobiography. In the course of working, CDW came to understand some things about community that it didn't know in the beginning. Community is a much-abused word, and often a vague one. It doesn't mean neighborhood, though neighborhood is indispensable to community. And it isn't by nature parochial. Again as Dennison suggests, "the greatest of minds are, in effect, its permanent residents. Just as some men are of the bureaucracy, others are of the community. All philosophers are of the community. All scientists are. All artists are." By the same token, we came to see that there are stories that are part of the community despite their being set in another locale and we haven't hesitated to incorporate them. Despite their origin, they are part of our history in ways that are essential because they are universal. *Fishmerchant's Daughter*, which CDW is publishing in two volumes, is one such story.

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